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Chairman: Mr. Maitland ..... (South Africa)

Contents

Agenda item 79: Questions relating to information

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 79: Questions relating to information (A/57/21 and A/57/157)

1. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/57/157) and drew attention to a number of the activities and achievements of the Department of Public Information since the report had been issued. The United Nations web site, whose popularity continued to grow worldwide, had been accessed 1.1 billion times in 2001 and would receive an estimated 1.6 billion hits in 2002, bringing the average number of daily visitors to 6.5 million from more than 172 countries. The United Nations News Centre, one of the most popular sites on the United Nations web site, would soon be available in all six official languages. He had taken steps to strengthen the management and development capacity of the web site by creating a new and separate Internet Service to complement the Department's Press Service and Radio and Television Service.

2. The Department of Public Information had worked to raise global awareness of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the largest and most complex conference ever held by the United Nations; it had kept the media informed of the ongoing negotiations and coordinated a plethora of media interviews with senior officials. The extraordinary coverage given to the Summit — it had been featured on the covers and front pages of some of the world's leading publications — had been complemented by an inter-agency marketing campaign coordinated by the Department of Public Information to coincide with the Summit.

3. The Department continued to pay special attention to Africa by, inter alia, publicizing the priorities set by the New Partnership for Africa's Development, disseminating an information kit and other material on the final review of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s and continuing its regular publication of *Africa Recovery*. In the past year, the *United Nations Chronicle* had further developed as a forum for academic discussion and debate and had successfully resumed publication in all six official languages of the Organization. The *United Nations Chronicle* feature service had been launched in close cooperation with United Nations information centres around the world. The *Yearbook of the United Nations* had made great strides in reducing the time lag between the publication date and the year covered and, despite resource constraints, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library continued to serve Member States and civil society effectively.

4. The debate surrounding the work of the Department was not a new one. As far back as 1948, there had been a rift between countries challenging the level of expenditure for public information activities and those, primarily in the developing world, pressing for an expansion of such activities. In the past 20 years, it had undergone at least seven periodic reviews, most recently in 1987-1988, and welcomed the latest opportunity to carry out a comprehensive review of its management and operations pursuant to General Assembly resolution 56/253. The report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/2002/2), set out the Secretary-General's vision of the direction the review should take and gave an account of its first stage. The principal conclusions of the comprehensive review of management and operations were contained in the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change (A/57/387), under section II.C entitled "Enhancing public information". In addition to the Department's own review, the results of a number of other reviews, including those relating to the United Nations system library services, Secretariat publications and the Office of Internal Oversight Services review of the United Nations information centres, would have an impact on the work of the Department.

5. In response to a number of problems set out in the above-mentioned reports — lack of clarity surrounding the Department's mission, fragmentation of its activities, a limited ability to match programme performance with "customer needs" and a confusing structure and insufficient degree of coordination with other Secretariat departments — the Secretary-General had proposed a new form of operation for the Department and the United Nations information centres. He had also requested a thorough evaluation of the Department's main products and services and changes in the provision of library services and the publications programme. Under the new operating procedures, the various Secretariat departments and

offices and other organizations of the United Nations system would be responsible for the content of information while the Department would be responsible for its coordination, presentation and dissemination, in close collaboration with the media, Member States and civil society. That new organizational structure would become effective on 1 November 2002; he had attached an organizational chart to the text of his statement.

6. He was anxious to hear Member States' views on the creation of United Nations regional information hubs in high-cost developed areas in order to free resources for strengthening information activities in the developing world. The first such information hub would be in Western Europe, excluding the information services in Geneva and Vienna, which provided vital services to United Nations offices in those locations. It was hoped that the new regional information hubs would strengthen the capacities of information centres away from New York and give them greater autonomy. Through innovative measures, the information centres would reach more people in the official languages, and in non-official languages as well. He would be consulting both Governments and regional organizations to determine what support they could provide to that end. Perhaps United Nations associations and universities in some countries could play a more active role in the translation and dissemination of information materials; his Department would be grateful for any assistance they could provide. Africa, Asia and Latin America as well as the Middle East would be given priority in rechannelling resources and efforts, which would be effected in a flexible manner. With the approval of the General Assembly, more specific proposals by the Secretary-General in that regard could be considered by the Committee on Information at its twenty-fifth session.

7. **Mr. Haggag** (Egypt), speaking as Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introduced the report of the Committee on its twenty-fourth session (A/57/21). The report reflected the rich and substantive nature of the Committee's discussions, which had focused on six reports submitted by the Secretary-General and introduced by the appropriate programme managers of the Department of Public Information, namely, reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/2002/2), United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (A/AC.198/2002/3), integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme: continued implementation of the views of host Governments (A/AC.198/2002/4), substantive questions: role of the Department of Public Information in United Nations peacekeeping (A/AC.198/2002/5), continued development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site in the six official languages (A/AC.198/2002/6) and activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in 2001 (A/AC.198/2002/7).

8. In the course of the Committee's general debate, many delegations had focused on the report of the Secretary-General on reorientation of United Nations in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/2002/2), noting that it contained some general preliminary findings on the Department's activities and effectiveness, to be followed by the submission of the results of the comprehensive review of its management and operations mandated in General Assembly resolution 56/253. Pending submission of those results, some of the findings and recommendations of the review were included in the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change, under the section "Enhancing public information" (A/57/387).

9. He drew attention to draft resolution B entitled "United Nations public information policies and activities", which had been the object of diverging views during the discussion. Some Committee members had felt that the resolution should be purely procedural in order to allow for a fuller examination of the issues in the comprehensive review. Others had maintained it was the Committee's responsibility to address the issues raised in the Secretary-General's six reports, particularly the reorientation of public information activities, in order to give the Department guidance as it proceeded to conduct its comprehensive review. The draft resolution before the Committee was a blend of all those views; it contained input from the Committee on the general thrust of public information activities and on certain programmes about which it had strong feelings and, at the same time, left the door open for further examination of certain proposals and future possibilities arising from the results of the comprehensive review. Paragraphs 4, 14, 15, 17, 21, 44 and 50, in particular, reflected a number of the information-related recommendations contained in the

report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change. Lastly, he drew attention to the Committee's draft decision on an increase in its membership from 98 to 99 with the appointment of Saudi Arabia.

10. **Mr. Stagno** (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the member countries of the Rio Group, said that the Committee on Information was doing commendable work in setting United Nations information policy and guiding the Department to keep pace with developments in the communications field. The Rio Group supported all the recommendations made in the Committee's report.

11. Better use must be made of the Department's available resources by suspending costly activities with little impact in favour of activities that reached a broader public, especially in regions that were unfamiliar with the United Nations message. However, the Rio Group was concerned that some of the Secretary-General's proposed departmental reforms did not take account of the positions expressed in the Committee on Information, which remained the policy organ.

12. One concern was that there should be a clear demarcation between the functions of the Secretariat — to provide rationalized and improved services — and those of the Committee — to set policy guidelines for the needed services. Member States, and not just the Secretary-General, had to define the Organization's communications strategies, and any departmental reorganization or monitoring should further those strategies and be led by the Committee.

13. The Rio Group was also concerned that the Secretary-General had not made any proposal for producing more web-site and radio information in languages other than English and French, and had not taken note of the recommendations of the Committee on Information in that regard. Certainly, the growing Spanish-speaking audience for information — as evidenced by the visits to the United Nations web site — needed to be better served as the Department diversified its language programming.

14. Furthermore, dissemination of information via the traditional media should not be neglected. Access to the Internet was unfortunately limited in the Rio Group countries as in all other developing countries, and the Secretary-General ought to specify how the Department would respond to their information needs.

15. The United Nations information centres were a valuable resource, and any budgetary decisions should be made together with the host countries, the priority being to improve their services.

16. **Ms. Pulido-Santana** (Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that issues relating to information had lately featured more prominently on the international political agenda, given the potential of the communications revolution to open vast new opportunities for economic growth and social development. Yet, paradoxically, as the communications and distance divide had narrowed, the digital divide had widened. The developing countries were unable to take full advantage of a knowledge-based economy, given the growing technological gap between rich and poor countries, and their human development had suffered accordingly. It would require a common effort by all nations, and leadership by the United Nations, to bridge the gap. The Organization had already begun to study the role of information and communications technology in development; and the two-stage World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in 2003 and 2005, would offer an opportunity for helping all countries to modernize and enjoy the benefits of proper access to and management of public information.

17. The proposals made in the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/387), together with the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee on Information at its successive sessions, could serve as the basis for reforming and strengthening the Department of Public Information. The Committee on Information was the main subsidiary organ authorized to make recommendations regarding the work of the Department. Member States, moreover, had to participate actively in the discussions and consultations on any restructuring of the Department, which would have to adhere to the priorities, mandates and activities established by the General Assembly. The Department should also maintain and improve its activities in areas of special interest to the developing countries so as to help eliminate the digital divide.

18. The United Nations information centres, so important in disseminating information about the work of the United Nations to the peoples of the world, had to be given a stronger role in the developing countries, whose needs were totally different from those of the developed world. Consequently, the possibility of establishing regional information hubs had to be

considered in terms of the particularities of each region.

19. The Group of 77 and China welcomed the proposals for integrating and modernizing the services of the United Nations library; however, the Secretary-General should consult with all parties concerned in developing the new approaches.

20. The traditional media, especially radio, were the most readily available medium for millions of people around the world, especially in the developing countries, and were the source of much of their knowledge about the United Nations. It was therefore a matter of concern that in the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/157) nothing was said about strengthening the traditional media. The report also made no reference to the issue of multilingualism in providing public information, including information on the United Nations web site, even though that issue had been very fully discussed in the Committee on Information at its last two sessions. All six official languages must be treated equally in the activities of the Department of Public Information, and appropriate language staff should be assigned to all its activities.

21. **Mr. Haggag** (Egypt) said that the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/57/157) brought out the much greater role taken by the United Nations in the past year and the expansion of the role of the Department of Public Information in various areas, such as its web site, its services to the media, its outreach to non-governmental organizations and its services to the public. Good work was also being done by the United Nations information centres in their host countries, and valuable information was being disseminated by the United Nations through its publications, its library and its cartographic section.

22. While adhering as far as possible to the guidelines set out by the Committee on Information, the Department had nonetheless found it difficult to carry out its multiple mandates within the limited financial and human resources allocated to it. Thus, the Department was wisely redefining its primary activities in order to focus on drawing attention to the major aspects of the Organization's work, and was aiming to prioritize its work programme and allocate its resources among its many mandated activities in order to maximize their impact on the targeted audiences.

23. In response to various ideas put forward by the Secretary-General on redirecting the Organization's information activities, the Committee on Information had adopted draft resolution B; any action taken on the new recommendations of the Secretary-General in his latest report (A/57/157) should take into account the positions set out by the Committee in that resolution.

24. Steps to restructure the Department or rearrange its priorities should in no way affect the existing mandates and approved activities. His delegation looked forward to any evaluation that the Department might conduct to ascertain the desired results of its activities or their impact on the targeted audiences, and hoped that such an evaluation would be submitted to Member States through the Committee on Information for decisions on whether to expand, renew or rationalize those activities.

25. Furthermore, restructuring efforts should not divert the Department's attention from working to achieve the priorities set by the Committee on Information. Foremost among them was the achievement of linguistic parity on the United Nations web site in all six official languages; the maintenance of live United Nations radio broadcasting; and the restoration of the financial and human resources of the United Nations information centres where there had been cutbacks.

26. The proposals the Secretary-General had made in his report on the strengthening of the United Nations and an agenda for further change (A/57/387) also needed to be addressed; the African Group of States had taken a common position on the Secretary-General's information-related recommendations.

27. **Mr. Al-Najar** (Yemen) said that the role of the media was to report facts objectively and clearly, without any doctoring. Yet there was no unbiased media at the current time. The fourth estate had caved in under the first estate, becoming controlled rather than independent.

28. His delegation recommended that the United Nations media assume a central position within the priorities of the Organization. United Nations information activities must be viewed as neutral and removed from political pressures, and should counteract the bias of the regular media. Furthermore, the public had the right to be informed about United Nations resolutions, the extent of their implementation, and the States which disregarded such resolutions.

29. The United Nations information activities should help reinforce harmony, cooperation, peace and mutual respect among peoples. In the world after 11 September, dialogue between civilizations and cultures should be encouraged, while clashes of civilizations and hatred between people should be discouraged. It was disgraceful that many attacks had been waged lately against Islam, belittling Prophet Muhammad. Such practices would increase hatred and dissent particularly between the more than one billion Muslims and the European and American people.

30. His delegation stressed the need to address the challenges imposed by the new technologies, and all the obstacles to the emergence of a new world information and communications order that would help improve people's quality of life. Developing countries should be given the opportunity to develop their information capacities, especially through the United Nations information centres, training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries, and cooperation between Governments and the United Nations for using training sessions provided by the latter.

31. The United Nations information centres were of great importance, although the one in Sanaa remained paralysed in the absence of a director. His delegation hoped that the United Nations would look into that matter sooner rather than later. The United Nations needed those centres in order to serve its noble goals which aimed to achieve international peace and security.

32. **Mr. Serdyukov** (Belarus) said that Belarus was firmly committed to pursuing the development of a system-wide communications strategy and culture of communications, as recommended by the Secretary-General and the Committee on Information. Building a new world information and communications order and strengthening communications as a core component of United Nations strategic activities continued to be of critical importance in reforming the Organization. The Department of Public Information should make further comprehensive efforts to reposition its activities in order to help close the technology gap between the North and the South and ensure that the developing countries and countries with economies in transition could make optimal use of the achievements of the digital revolution. Effective implementation of those tasks would be facilitated by a systematic evaluation of the activities of the Department of Public Information, as proposed by the Secretary-General, with a view to developing agreed information and communications strategies. Crucial aspects of that work would include the strengthening of the information centres component, the balanced use of conventional means of communication, the introduction of new information technology and the achievement of true multilingualism in United Nations information and communications activities.

33. His Government continued to work to expand and enrich the bilateral information flows between Belarus and the United Nations. As a tangible result of that policy, Belarusian radio stations had, in the course of the year, joined the live radio project; Belarusian listeners now had the unique opportunity to receive daily information first-hand about the work of the Organization, prepared on an ongoing basis by the United Nations radio's Russian service. He also noted with satisfaction the Department's training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

34. His delegation strongly supported all efforts aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the information infrastructure of the Untied Nations peacekeeping operations. Clearly, there was an objective need to highlight information relating to the safety of United Nations peacekeeping personnel.

35. His delegation wished once again to urge the Department of Public Information and other bodies of the United Nations system to give continued coverage to efforts to overcome the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, the largest man-made disaster in the history of mankind. It was grateful to the Department of Public Information for its practical initiatives thus far and hoped that the United Nations would continue to implement a long-term and comprehensive policy in that regard.

36. **Mr. Kokuu** (Japan) said that in a world flooded with information it was more necessary than ever to ensure effective and efficient dissemination of information about the United Nations and its activities. He therefore looked forward to the comprehensive review of the management and operations of the Department of Public Information and the reviews of United Nations publications and information materials, library services and information centres conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The relevant reports should be distributed as early as possible in

order to allow delegations time to consider them carefully.

37. In the ongoing process of reform of the United Nations, resources should be reallocated from low priority and obsolete activities to high-priority activities such as achieving the goals of the Millennium Declaration; the Secretary-General should identify activities to be discontinued, including in the field of information activities. In that context, the recent restructuring of the Department of Public Information must be assessed from the point of view of effectiveness and efficiency and periodic reviews should be undertaken to ensure that its activities remained timely and relevant. Although his Government had no objection to the transfer of the Cartographic Section to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, it believed that the Cartographic Section should continue to provide adequate service to other departments. With regard to the proposed systematic evaluation of the impact and cost-effectiveness of the activities of the Department of Public Information, he noted that the review already under way covered a similar ground; he also asked why the proposed evaluation would take two or three years to complete. Finally, he expressed the hope that the limited resources available for publishing activities would be allocated to those issues which were of the highest priority.

38. **Mr. Requeijo** (Cuba) said that it was regrettable that the great advances in the areas of science, technology, information and communications which had contributed so greatly to globalization were not equally shared by all the peoples of the world. The growing imbalance between the developed and developing worlds was most obvious in the area of the dissemination of information, hence the increasingly urgent need to establish a new world information and communications order. Unfortunately, the developed world continued to ignore the problem and expect the rest of the world to accept the role of passive consumer of information disseminated for the purposes of political, economic and ideological domination. The developing countries lacked the resources to maintain adequate information services. Access to objective information which took into account the characteristics and traditions of peoples would contribute to strengthening relations between all countries, yet every day the rich and poor countries were bombarded with information without any independent control of the accuracy of that information. That led to the creation of stereotypes and misinformation and was unjust and immoral.

39. United Nations public information activities must provide action-oriented alternatives to that monopoly of information. His delegation welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information to develop United Nations web sites and disseminate information to the remotest areas of the world. Funding for radio and television programmes must be maintained and efforts should continue to improve the web site, in all official languages.

40. His delegation once again denounced the daily radio and television attacks directed against Cuba from the territory of the United States, in the form of over 300 hours a day of programming of all types from 17 broadcasting stations on 24 different frequencies. Fifteen of the 17 stations belonged to organizations linked to terrorist elements living and operating in United States territory with the full consent and knowledge of the federal authorities. Eleven stations existed only to transmit destabilizing propaganda against Cuba; one station, Radio y Televisión Martí, belonged to the Government and had a budget of US$ 35 million a year. Such broadcasts violated Cuban sovereignty, international law, and the regulations of the International Frequency Registration Board. In spite of United Nations resolutions against the abuse of information for criminal or terrorist purposes, the Government of the United States continued to finance, facilitate and encourage grossly distorted programming which encouraged illegal emigration and incited violence and contempt for the rule of law in Cuba. He reiterated his delegation's condemnation of that electronic war and stressed that the Cuban people had the sovereign right to choose the type of information they wished to receive and would not be influenced by a foreign power. His Government would continue to defend its sovereignty and independence and would counter those efforts to the best of its ability.

41. **Ms. Baaziz** (Algeria) said that the Department of Public Information should develop a strategy for ensuring that all countries benefited from the new communications technologies that had made it possible to transmit information at unimaginable speed throughout the world. The developing countries must be helped to develop the needed skilled workforce and infrastructure to narrow the information gap between

them and the developed countries and become integrated into the global economy.

42. The United Nations itself had made remarkable progress in taking advantage of the new techniques. Its Internet web site — which received about 5 million visits daily from over 156 countries — was first-rate. The principle of linguistic diversity was well served by its excellent web site pages in several languages, and the news centre was outstanding. In developing the services it offered, the Department should ensure equal treatment for all six official languages, not only on the web site but also in its publications and in the documentation and reference materials available in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

43. The United Nations should be a major force for freedom of the press and for cooperation with the developing countries to lessen the control of the developed countries over the dissemination of information. Special attention should be paid to the training of journalists particularly from African countries, which lagged badly in the field of information in general and journalism in particular. The Department should make renewed efforts to publicize United Nations decolonization activities, using the media to support its work to free the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories from the colonial yoke.

44. The United Nations information centres were a very promising way of broadening the access of the developing countries to information, communications and documentation. The centres should be funded regularly and staffed appropriately. The possibility of setting up regional information hubs could be considered in regions where the cost of doing so was high and where the communications infrastructures already existed, on condition that guidelines approved by the Committee on Information and the General Assembly were followed and the countries concerned were involved. In regions where the infrastructures were not in place, the goal of having information reach the people would be compromised.

45. **Mr. Mekel** (Israel) said the revolution in communications technologies had affected virtually every facet of life, in particular the use and dissemination of information. In most societies, increased access to news and information had had, on balance, a positive impact on progress and democracy. The genuine free flow of information and exchange of ideas and opinions could only occur in an open society, however, and it was unfortunate that there were those who sought to control the news media and sources of information available to the public, denying their people their right to participate in the great forward march of humanity. The attacks of 11 September and subsequent attacks had been perpetrated by the disciples of closed societies. Their target was the right of mankind to think, create and debate freely. One of the most blatant examples of that attitude had been the cold-blooded murder of the journalist Daniel Pearl, killed for seeking the truth. His delegation commended the Committee for observing World Press Freedom Day 2002, which had featured a videotaped interview with Mr. Pearl's widow.

46. The Internet had transformed the world in what might one day be regarded as the single greatest development in the field of communications since the invention of the printing press. It could be used to enhance knowledge and understanding and promote democracy but could also be used to promote hatred intolerance, anti-Semitism and other forms of prejudice and racism, the very antithesis of democracy. The international community must remain vigilant and ensure that the wondrous technological innovations of the twenty-first century were used to promote progress, tolerance, knowledge and understanding, and not as a tool to subvert the ideals of humanity as expressed in the Charter of the United Nations.

47. **Mr. Romeiro** (Brazil), speaking on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) welcomed the steps taken by the Department of Public Information to develop coherent communication strategies for the Organization and to concentrate its efforts on effective products and activities. It was important that the information products of the Organization should reach a wide public all over the world. That outreach must be measured in a more systematic and quantifiable manner, however, so as to avoid fragmentation of information activities. Any action taken to evaluate the impact of the Department's activities should generate permanent performance indicators.

48. Radio broadcasting was one of the most efficient means of communication. United Nations broadcasts in Portuguese were of high quality, and their audience was constantly expanding. He inquired as to the status of the new post in that radio section. Traditional means of communication, such as radio, television and publications continued to play an important role; CPLP

agreed that radio in particular remained one of the most effective and far-reaching traditional media, especially in the developing world. It also agreed that all publications should respond to an identifiable need and not duplicate other publications and that they should be produced in a cost-effective manner.

49. The world, in particular the developed world, suffered from information overload; the Department of Public Information must focus on the important messages to be conveyed and the important audiences to be reached. CPLP therefore shared the Secretary-General's concern about the level of resources being spent on United Nations information centres in the developed countries, where access to information was widely available, noted with interest the idea of downsizing those centres and requested information on the level of resources which could be reallocated as a result.

50. Press releases were a valuable tool and should not be discontinued; CPLP remained flexible as to what the structure should be for their production.

51. **Mr. Choo** Jong-youn (Republic of Korea), referring to the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387), said that his delegation supported the initiatives aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department of Public Information. The Department needed to prioritize its activities and evaluate their effectiveness by identifying the targeted audience and clarifying the programme's objectives. Endeavours such as the new e-mail service should be strengthened. At the same time, a review should be made of traditional activities, including publications, which were being marginalized in the electronic age.

52. It would be useful to promote closer cooperation between the Department of Public Information and commercial communications entities with a view to expanding coverage of United Nations activities. A case in point was the cooperation between the Department and the Korean Broadcasting System, which had resulted in the participation of a traditional Korean orchestra in the recent United Nations Day concert. It would be beneficial to explore the possibilities of joint endeavours on special television programmes. With that in mind, the Department should also develop relationships with a wide cross-section of correspondents and journalists from various countries to promote greater interest in issues on the United Nations agenda. His delegation welcomed the strengthening of programmes for media personnel from developing countries.

53. Turning to the issue of the United Nations information centres, he stressed the importance of avoiding duplication and said that his delegation supported the proposal to establish regional information hubs. With regard to peacekeeping operations, he said that his Government planned to strengthen its participation in that field. It was important to enhance the awareness of peoples and mobilize support for those activities. The Department of Public Information should therefore continue to strengthen its capacity for ensuring the effectiveness of the information component in peacekeeping, and develop a coherent information strategy. A historic event, such as the independence of East Timor, was a good example of the importance of publicizing the successful role of the United Nations.

54. His delegation joined others in emphasizing that the United Nations should work on bridging the digital divide. All countries and peoples should be enabled to derive the vast benefits of modern information and communications technologies.

55. **Mr. Singhara Na Ayudhaya** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) said that ASEAN fully supported the Secretary-General's recommendations on enhancing public information contained in his report in document A/57/387. Given the importance of the work of the Department of Public Information in raising public awareness of United Nations activities, ASEAN urged the Department to make optimal use of available communications technologies to ensure the widest possible outreach. With respect to developing countries, the Department should continue its activities in such priority areas as poverty eradication, health and education. ASEAN supported the Secretary-General's proposals to restructure the Department, especially with regard to the establishment of the Division of Strategic Communications. It also welcomed the Department's plan to conduct a systematic evaluation of all its activities. ASEAN stressed the importance of the United Nations information centres; their responsibilities should include the dissemination of information in languages other than the official languages of the United Nations. ASEAN also

welcomed the possibility of establishing regional information hubs, which should benefit all developing countries, and should take into account the different circumstances in each region.

56. Given the importance of bridging the digital divide, ASEAN reiterated its full support for the establishment of the United Nations Information Technology Service, the Health InterNetwork and the Information and Communications Technology Task Force. At the same time, the Department of Public Information should continue to make full use of traditional media such as radio, television and news publications, which reached the larger population of the developing world. ASEAN fully supported the integration of the United Nations libraries and especially welcomed plans to have the Dag Hammarskjöld Library assume responsibility for setting policy and coordinating the work of all United Nations libraries. It also supported the plans to improve electronic access to United Nations collections and facilitate the transfer of paper collections to electronic files, as well as all efforts to make full use of the Internet. The Department should continue to assist the Permanent Missions in improving their web sites.

57. There was a need for closer coordination between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Objective and impartial coverage would immensely contribute to greater public understanding of the work of the United Nations, which in turn would help promote participation of the local population and enhance the safety and security of United Nations personnel. ASEAN also attached great importance to the central role of the Department of Public Information in the selection of spokespersons for United Nations missions. With regard to the proposal of the Secretary-General to transfer the Cartographic Section to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, ASEAN stressed the importance of taking into account matters relating to the primary task of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security and avoiding a possible institutional burden for that Department, especially after implementation of the Brahimi reforms.

58. **Mrs. Mulamula** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that her delegation fully subscribed to recommendations contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/57/21). Her delegation was gratified that in June 2002, the General Assembly had devoted a two-day meeting to the consideration of information and communications technology for development; unfortunately, the deliberations of that important meeting had not filtered through to the work of the Committee, since the initiative had emanated from other bodies of the General Assembly. It was important to consider practical measures for bridging the digital divide, bearing in mind that the transfer of technology was not merely a matter of making equipment available but involved access to knowledge and information as keys to development. The Department of Public Information could help developing countries improve their technological capacity in the field of information, particularly through the United Nations information centres and various training programmes, including the training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries. Her delegation commended the Department for further improving the United Nations web site.

59. Her delegation supported in principle the broad proposals for improving the efficiency of the Department of Public Information, which should provide operational support for other departments, rather than duplicating their work. The Secretary-General's review of the Department's management and operations should aim at strengthening the role of the Department and should focus on its mandated functions, ensuring active collaboration with other United Nations departments, as well as offices in the field. Her delegation was encouraged by the continued efforts of the Secretary-General to address the imbalances in the resources available to the United Nations information centres in developing and developed countries. The proposal to create regional information hubs should be studied carefully, and practical criteria should be established with regard to the location of information centres. The support and consent of the countries concerned was of paramount importance.

60. Her delegation commended the impressive role played by the United Nations Information Centre in Dar-es-Salaam despite financial and staffing constraints, and welcomed the launching of the Centre's web site under the direction of a Tanzanian national. It hoped that the Department of Public Information would soon fill the professional post earmarked to strengthen the Centre, and that the appointment process would be transparent and would

give priority to qualified Tanzanian nationals, taking into consideration knowledge of the national language, Kiswahili, and culture.

61. While the extended use of new information technologies by the Department of Public Information was commendable, it was still essential to maintain traditional means of disseminating information, such as print and radio. The maintenance and strengthening of radio services was crucial to the developing world, especially Africa, as a cost-effective medium for reaching millions of people. Her delegation strongly supported the continuation of the live radio project, which should be put on a sound financial footing; it supported the Department's commitment to include funding proposals in the programme budget for 2004-2005 for the continuation of that project. The Kiswahili language programme reached an audience of more than 70 million people across the African continent and was one of the outstanding successes of the Department; however, additional human and material resources were needed.

62. **Mr. Ononye** (Nigeria) said that his delegation supported the modernization of the Department of Public Information; however, extreme care must be taken not to disrupt the Department's outreach programme. Nigeria endorsed the Department's efforts to prioritize its work programme by focusing on such vital issues as poverty eradication, conflict prevention, sustainable development, human rights, HIV/AIDS and international terrorism; that strategy benefited developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. One of the most important programmes was the live radio project, which enjoyed an audience of 50 million in Nigeria alone. He hoped that adequate funding would be available so that it could continue. His delegation commended the Department for developing and maintaining the United Nations web site. The daily press briefing, the United Nations television service and the training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries should also continue. He also commended the Department for the expansion of its cartographic and geographic products and services, particularly the cartographic presentations in support of Security Council briefings and the revised peacekeeping and gender maps.

63. The United Nations information centres served as the local voice of the Organization throughout the world. However, Nigeria believed that the proposal to establish regional information hubs would be feasible only in regions with high rent and maintenance costs. Plans to establish the hubs should be flexible and should be implemented on a case-by-case basis, with the consent of the countries concerned.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.